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Spy Suspect, Convicted of Burglaries at 17, Was Warned by Judge

By ERIC SCHMITT

John A. Walker Jr., who is accused of spying for the Soviet Union, was convicted of burglarizing four businesses around Scranton, Pa., along with another youth, when they were both 17 years old, according to an article published today in The Scranton Times.

The youths were placed on probation in custody of their parents, with their school principals ordered to prevent truancy, the article said. "This is a chance for you fellows to go straight," Judge Otto P. Robinson of the Lackawanna County Juvenile Court told the boys in June 1965. "Don't make another mistake. Learn the Ten Commandments and obey them and you won't be in further trouble."

The Navy knew about Mr. Walker's juvenile criminal record in April 1964 when it granted him high security clearance on nuclear submarines, according to juvenile court records obtained by the paper.

"Generally speaking, if a man is allowed to come into the service, he's judged from that time on," said William Caldwell, a Defense Department spokesman. In general, he said, granting security clearance to someone with a juvenile criminal record depends on the level of clearance requested, the seriousness of the offense and how long ago it was committed.

"It's not unheard of for someone to have a juvenile record before joining the Navy," said Lieut. Comdr. Mike Labbe, a Navy spokesman. He said that a three-officer review board must approve the application of any recruit who has a criminal record.

Friend Was Not at Home

According to the Scranton Times article, which is based on court records, Mr. Walker's crime took place on the evening of May 27, 1965, five months before he left high school to join the Navy.

Mr. Walker met a friend, whom court records did not identify, at a candy store near Mr. Walker's home. The two decided to drive Mr. Walker's car to Pittston, 10 miles to the south, to visit a friend. When they arrived, the friend was not home, so they began driving around.

Mr. Walker's friend boasted of stealing \$577 in a series of burglaries, according to a court summary of the case. The friend persuaded Mr. Walker to join him in more thefts, the summary indicated.

Along the route back to Scranton from Pittston, the boys first broke into an Esso service station, where they got

nothing. They then stopped at a second Esso station, where they took \$3 in cash and two old tires, the article said.

At a used car office nearby, they stole six cans of cleaner and four quarts of oil. They also took a money box, which they later discovered was empty.

Back in their neighborhood in West Scranton, the boys stopped at a haberdashery. They entered the store's men's room through a ventilator, only to be thwarted by a barricaded door, according to the article.

Shot Fired at Gas Tank

On the way out, Mr. Walker tripped over a board, alerting a patrolman walking in front of the store.

According to the article, Mr. Walker's accomplice fled into a dark yard and Mr. Walker clambered through a wooden fence. The officer, William Shygelski fired an errant shot at Mr. Walker, who dashed to his car and fled.

As the car sped away, Officer Shygelski flagged down a passing motorist and had the driver follow Mr. Walker's car. They caught up with Mr. Walker at a stop light, but as Officer Shygelski got out and approached the front car, Mr. Walker drove off. Officer Shygelski fired a shot at the car's gas tank, although court records do not indicate whether he hit it.

The policeman got back into the commandeered car and had the driver pursue Mr. Walker at speeds of up to 85 miles per hour through the streets of Scranton and finally onto a state highway, where Mr. Walker eventually escaped, the article said.

He drove all night to Williamsport, about 110 miles southwest.

It is unclear how Mr. Walker was finally apprehended by the Williamsport police, the article stated, but he was returned to Scranton on June 1, 1965.

He and his accomplice, who was arrested in Scranton soon after Mr. Walker's return, were brought to court two weeks after the crimes. Both pleaded guilty, the court records showed.

According to The Scranton Times, Judge Robinson sentenced Mr. Walker and his accomplice to indefinite terms at the State Correctional Institution for Boys at Camp Hill, Pa., but stayed the sentences pending the youths' future good conduct.

"I can't see anything in favor of any one of you," said the judge, who, like Officer Shygelski, is now dead. "You are just two crooks. The only thing in favor of you is that this is the first time you have been in court."